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SFA Gardens

Spring 2012

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SFA Gardens News

Notes from the Director By Dr. David Creech

Hello from SFA Gardens land! All is well, except perhaps for my usual litany of crises. Dawn thinks I'm not happy unless there's a disaster around here. If you garden, you understand. If you garden at an institution of higher learning, you really understand. Public gardens are normally quite complicated, and we're no exception. Some detractors call them problem magnets. We think we're here to educate, entertain and enlighten.

SFA Gardens' latest mantra is water savings. It needs to be, has to be and should have been. Like easy oil, easy water has just become a bit more valuable. Add in the drought of the past two years, and while we've had good rainfalls this past winter and early spring, we all know when things go bad, they go bad quickly. Only time will tell what our summer has in store, but SFA Gardens will be ready. We've been transitioning from sprinkler to drip irrigation as fast as we can. We've added miles of drip pipe, all run by low-cost time clocks and controllers. For those of you interested, you might check out a recent article in

TNLA Green magazine that explains the realities on trying to get by on less - <http://www.tnlagreen.org/tnlagreen/201204#pg6>. One commonly dreaded question gardeners face is "How much water is enough?" I usually say, "Well, it depends on who you ask." Simply put,

small and not fully established. When a tree/shrub/perennial/lawn landscape is fully established and root systems are everywhere, savings are less. Plant water use is what it is.

Since the last newsletter, the big highlight for SFA Gardens was the dedication



SFA President Dr. Baker Pattillo, *right*, congratulates Ray Mize on the dedication and sign unveiling for the new Gayla Mize Garden.

there's an amount of water needed for a plant to thrive and a lesser amount for that same plant to survive. We're going to walk the edge. Water savings by drip can be quite dramatic, but that's primarily in the early years of a garden's development when plants are young,

of the Gayla Mize Garden April 16. The weather was perfect, and the crowd at the entrance to our brand new eight-acre garden was all smiles. President Baker Pattillo and Dr. Steve Bulard, dean of the Arthur Temple of College of Forestry and Agriculture, spent

time at the microphone extolling SFA's support for the Gayla Mize Garden. It's another step in making Nacogdoches the garden capitol of the South. Most importantly, Ray Mize and his two children, Lysa Mize Hagan and Jimmy Mize, were beaming with the unveiling of our new sign - a bold, modern and colorful engraved rock slab. This is a garden on the fast track. For updates on our progress here, we have placed Gayla Mize Garden updates on our website. As icing on the cake, we're midway through



a project to build an octagonal pavilion near the entrance. This structure is being designed to melt into the high canopy pine forest landscape. With eight large cedar posts and heartwood cedar beams, it's meant to last. Thanks go out to Ryan Cupit, Ray's and Gayla's grandson, for bringing his expertise on site and helping us build the pavilion. It isn't easy to miter beams, and Ryan did a masterful job. Next on our agenda here is a flagstone floor for the pavilion, and then rafters! Come take a look!

Our LaNana creek corridor project is heading into summer with almost 1,000 bald cypress varieties, hybrids and genotypes planted. This is perhaps the finest,

most diverse collection of *Taxodium* in the nation, and it's a perfect spot for a long-term project. When people ask me how long an evaluation project this is, I tell them that this project will be terminated in 5012 A.D. Bald cypress can live a long time, you know. *Taxodium* species prefer wet bottomlands and stramsides, their natural habitat, and our sliver of stream is a perfect site. We will be drip irrigating for the first two years only. After that, the trees will be fine without supplemental water. For SFA Gardens, the goal is simple - connecting the Pineywoods Native Plant Center with the Mast Arboretum via a shady corridor in the summer and a sunlit path for the winter. Perfect.

I'm really pleased to report that we have three brand-new fully functioning stormwater/biofilter rain gardens at the PNPC. This project was initiated by Drs. Matthew McBroom and Yanli Zhang, and it will serve as the master's thesis project of Justin Wang. SFA Gardens agreed - OK, I agreed - to assist the project, and the pits were dug in late January. It wasn't long before unanticipated problems surfaced, some exciting meetings ensued, a six-week delay occurred and rains made a mess of the project. That's all history now, and the rain gardens are in place. This is a great project, and it is perfect for the times. Justin will be monitoring water volumes retained and water quality factors at the entrance and

outlets of the three rain gardens. Since all three rain gardens are fed by water shed from three parking lots (Raguet Elementary, Tucker House and the Music Preparatory Building), Justin will be able to track the influence of the gardens on runoff and water quality. Now that the pits are finally filled with fast draining sand, we have covered the rain gardens with a layer of mulch. The last step is planting. Finally, we get to the fun part. This is the first dynamic example of the utility of biofilters at SFA! Stay tuned.

There's another garden taking shape on the south side of the Mast Arboretum - it's a full sun spot on the east side of the soccer field. Drs. Jeff Adkins and Michael Maurer along with Dawn Stover deserve a round of applause for bringing this on line. With a wide range of vegetable and fruit crops already thriving, it's a great spot to demonstrate all kinds of ways to produce food. That's where I started. As a young Texas A&M University horticulture student, I bought into the then prevalent, somewhat macho philosophy: "If you can't eat it, why grow it?" I've gotten over that.

Our Spring Garden Gala Day plant sale April 21 set a new record for organization and degree of crowd happiness. It was the third-highest dollar amount in our history for a spring sale - and I don't think I've ever seen such a big selection of healthy plants. Thanks go out to Greenleaf Nursery for their donation of specimen-sized camellias and JBerry Nursery's donation of a wide range of colorful landscape plants! Until next time, let's keep planting!

When Do They Bloom?

By Barb Stump

With more than 520 different named cultivars of azaleas from which to choose, how could we tell you precisely when they would bloom? Or, even when peak bloom would be? Without a doubt this was the most asked question during this year's Nacogdoches Azalea Trail. We don't have a crystal ball that tells us the magic dates, but I can at least suggest a sequence that you can follow next year.

First, we need to talk a little about how the weather affected our azaleas this year. In a word, our season was early, no doubt about that. For the past 11 years running, our biggest show was the last weekend in March. Given this track record, and the last two cool springs, we encouraged our colleagues at the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau to set the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail dates for a long season, March 10 through April 7. But our spring was warm and early, with 80s and 90s off and on all March. The azalea buds opened on the climate's schedule, not ours. Our azalea symposium is often too cool for much bloom, but this year by March 10 the garden was at about 30 percent of peak azalea bloom. By Little Princess Tea Party time March 31, we were tapering off on the large masses of azalea blooms and moving on with the later-blooming varieties. The peak this year came fully two weeks earlier than normal, occurring from March 17-24. The good news is that even though the azaleas were blooming at a furious pace, the Japanese maple foliage was also providing an exceptional show.

Now, regardless of the timing of

warmth or cold, our long list of azalea varieties will bloom in the same sequence. Let's call them early, middle, and late.

Early (mid-February, early March): We start with our purple-and-white striped 'Geisha' and the front line of "purple spider azalea" on University Drive provides a wall of lavender flowing drawing people in to visit the gardens. The lovely double peachy-pink 'Hampton Beauty' and the fiery 'Hershey's Orange' fill the southern end of the garden with glowing fire. Many of the azaleas blooming at this time are brilliant



jewel colors, which show well against dark foliage in weak early spring sun: Think of the Kurume azaleas, with their many tiny pink ('Coral Bells'), fuchsia-pink ('Hino de Giri'), red ('Christmas Cheer') and white ('Snow') flowers that cover the bushes. One deciduous azalea, 'Phlox Pink' also blooms very early.

Middle (last three weeks of March): For the biggest masses of large blooms, we have the tried-and-true white 'Mrs. G. G. Gerbing', lavender 'George Lindley Tabor', double pink 'Pink Ruffles.' The Formosas, classic "Southern" azaleas, have to have heat to fully open, but temperatures higher than 90 cause even these to

look peaked. We have a number of Girard azaleas and Encore™ that bloom well in this period in a whole range of colors from white through brilliant red. One oddity of this season was the unexpectedly early blooming of most of our deciduous azaleas. Normally, they will continue to bloom into April and some into May, but when 'Jeb Stuart,' 'Stonewall Jackson,' 'Emma Samson,' 'Aromi Sunrise' and 'High Tide' were blooming in mid-March, we knew this season was going to be a fast one.

Late (April into May): This is when the late blooming azaleas really shine. In mid-April this year the garden was a-glow with the bright coral of 'Robin Hill Gillie', the soft pink of 'Nancy of Robin-hill', and multi-colored coral-and-white Satsuki 'White Moon'. And then, for a showstopper, Satsuki azaleas of all colors bloom on the far western side of the garden.

The word Satsuki translates to "5th month" in Japanese an appropriate name for a group that normally blooms in May. One of my all-time favorites is 'Wakaebisu.' It is perfect --the warm salmon, semi-double petals are a heavenly color, and the blossoms cover the low-growing, dark-green plants, giving the effect of a flowing tide of color.

So you can see we don't turn on the "color switch" for just one weekend, but let the color flow for six to eight weeks. The bottom line is, whether the sequence starts in mid-February and ends in early April or shifts into mid-May, this bloom sequence may give you a guide for "flower-spotting" on your travels through our garden.

Cutting Up in the Garden-My Favorite Native Cut Flowers

By Greg Grant

Real gardeners would live in the garden if they could. There's nothing like the comforting embrace of one's own horticultural paradise. Who doesn't feel happy surrounded by their own flowers, herbs, fruits, and vegetables? Not only do they give us a sense of satisfaction, they make us healthier and happier to boot. Flowers are often referred to as "smiles from God," and I have to agree. I try to make it a point to give as many flowers to folks as I can. My Momma always said, "If you can't say something good, don't say anything at all." Unfortunately, this often leaves me speechless. However, hand somebody a bouquet of freshly-picked flowers from your garden, and they can't help but feel good.

Regrettably, all flowers don't make good cut flowers. Those that wilt or quickly drop their petals should stay in the garden. The best cut flowers, of course, have long stems, making them easier to cut, carry and display in vases or jars, in my case. I keep plenty of clean brown root beer bottles, colored glass water bottles and Mason jars (if I know I'm going to get them back) on hand for passing out bouquets. I also keep a box of very small antique brown bottles Pam Puryear gave me years ago for making up tiny arrangements when there aren't many gaudy things to be had.

Flowers should be cut in the morning when they are fully turgid and full of water. Always try to cut

flowers before they are fully open which makes them last longer. Full blown flowers are just waiting to



A bouquet of natives including firewheel, beauty berry and fall aster.

shatter their petals. I generally include some tight buds and full buds as well. They make the arrangement look more natural, as well as extend the display. The faster you plunge your bounty in water, the longer it will last, so plan to have a container of water with you when you harvest. A handful of flowers may look great wandering through the garden but it's not doing them any favors.

If you have access to them, commercial floral preservatives can extend the vase life of your cut flowers. It's often available from florists and hobby stores. I generally make my own "floral preservative" by using one teaspoon of household bleach and one scant tablespoon of table sugar dissolved in a gallon of water. The bleach helps kill organisms that clog up the water flow into the flower stems and the sugar helps feed the flower that doesn't know it's dead

yet. Some folks use a little mouthwash in the water for this same effect. If you don't want to fool with this, completely changing the water in the vase every day also extends the life of cut flowers.

Everybody has favorite cut flowers; go make some smiles!

References:

"The Bountiful Flower Garden" by friends and mentors, William C. Welch and Neil Odenwald (Taylor Publishing, 2000).

"Grasses, Pods, Vines, Weeds-Decorating with Texas Naturals by Quentin Steitz" (University of Texas Press, 1987). Though out of print, it's well worth the search. I bought a valuable second copy at the local library book sale recently for 50 cents!



A summertime arrangement, including native mealy cup sage and garden phlox

Greg's Checklist of Great Native Cut Flowers

- ✓ **Bee Balm (*Mondarda spp.*)**
I've never met a *Monarda* I didn't like in a vase, but of course 'Peter's Purple' is to die for!
- ✓ **Black Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia spp.*)**: They seem to last forever. *R. hirta* is generally available in mass in waste places. I'm fond of the giant cone flower (*R. maxima*) which is an East Texas native. All *Rudbeckia* are great, however.
- ✓ **Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)**: Red buckeye flowers are spectacular, and the seed pods also make for interesting accents.
- ✓ **Carolina Larkspur (*Delphinium spp.*)**: The re-seeding, annual, single-flowered "bunny bloom" larkspur is one of my all-time favorites for cutting, but our native Carolina larkspur is a rare treat.
- ✓ **Cattail (*Typha latifolia*)**: There's no substitute for cattails in Southern arrangements. They look great, of course, with other swamp dwellers like Louisiana iris and palmetto.
- ✓ **Coral Bean (*Erythrina herbacea*)**: The dramatic red flower spikes are a natural.
- ✓ **Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)**: Ever-green foliage is great for the holidays, especially the heavy-berried blue females.
- ✓ **Goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*)**: Despite the cries of the uninformed, goldenrod DOES NOT cause allergies like its inconspicuous ragweed neighbor that blooms at the same time. Goldenrod makes a superb, long lasting cut flower.
- ✓ **Holly (*Ilex spp.*)**: No decent floral designer can live without one of our Southern hollies. Possum haw is my favorite.
- ✓ **Hydrangea (*Hydrangea spp.*)**: Fresh and dried hydrangeas are trendy all over the world right now and for good reason. They are beautiful! I do best with the white oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*) in my garden. All need extra water during the summer.
- ✓ **Liatris (*Liatris spp.*)**: I've got mostly *Liatris aspera* in my neck of the woods, but God put all liatris on earth to be wonderful cut flowers.
- ✓ **Inland Sea Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)**: This streamside native makes great filler material for any display.
- ✓ **Palmetto (*Sabal minor*)**: Actually all *Sabal* are great for design work - either natural or trimmed.
- ✓ **Phlox (*Phlox sp.*)**: All phlox species make good cut flowers, especially *Phlox paniculata* with it's long stems. Pick mildew resistant cultivars from the South like 'John Fanick' and 'Victoria'.
- ✓ **Purple Coneflowers (*Echinacea spp.*)**: Though generally pink, they now come in white, yellow, orange, green and double flowered. The best ones for the garden are the simple wild ones, though.
- ✓ **Rattan Vine (*Berchemia scandens*)**: The smooth flexible young stems are wonderful for adding height and movement to a design. The blue berries are attractive additions, too. I used to sell this "twisted sister" to a Dallas florist by the truck load.
- ✓ **Rush (*Juncus spp.*)**: Rigid, upright leaves make for dramatic arrangements. I especially like to use rushes with early spring jonquils, which have rush-like foliage.
- ✓ **Smilax (*Smilax smallii*)**: This nearly thornless greenery was historically called "Jackson Vine" or "Bamboo Vine" in the South and is wonderful for draping mantels, railings, chandeliers, etc. My mom loves it!
- ✓ **Wild Rye (*Erymus spp.*)**: The seed heads of these two native shade loving perennial grasses are great fresh or dried. Plant their seed in the fall.
- ✓ Others my mom likes to use: beauty berry, bracket fungi, Carolina snail seed, coral honeysuckle, fleabane, lichen, May apple, obedient plant, pawpaw, pine cones and needles, Solomon's seal, southern sugar maple, sweet gum stems, trillium, wax myrtle, and winged elm.

Bugs, Bees, Butterflies and Blossoms

By Elyce Rodewald



Bugs, Bees, Butterflies and Blossoms is an annual event at the SFA Mast Arboretum that gives SFA Elementary Education majors the opportunity to teach in an “outdoor classroom.” Under the direction of Dr. Alan Sowards and Dr. Cheryl Boyette, the SFA students prepare science lessons appropriate for kindergarten-third graders and on their designated days, arrive full of enthusiasm at the Arboretum, with supplies in hand, to greet hundreds of school children from around East Texas. The garden is, amazingly enough, orderly and fairly quiet during BBBB. If you should happen to wander down a path, you might



hear children singing about bees (head, thorax, abdomen, abdomen), see a teacher being dressed up as a tree or hear squeals of excitement as children investigate a rotten log. A host of volunteers help the event run smoothly. John Boyette, district forester with Texas Forest Service, shares the Project Learning Tree curriculum with the SFA students prior to the event and also brings his crew to help set up and



take down numerous tents, tables, coolers and trash cans. The Pineywoods Beekeeper Association provides observation hives and knowledgeable beekeepers for each of the bee stations. The garden staff politely looks the other way as little ones might step off the paths or pick a flower or two. They wait patiently for the week-long invasion to end and are so very supportive of educating the children and also

allowing the SFA students the opportunity to have an outdoor teaching and learning experience.

This year is our 15th anniversary for BBBB. A kindergarten student who attended the very first event was back this spring as an SFA Elementary Education major. Monica Mayfield, now a senior at SFA, remembered her first BBBB experience in a recent interview with the Nacogdoches Daily Sentinel. “The hands-on experience I had, even that young and in kindergarten, had an effect on who I am today. I feel like once we complete this program, we will be ready to get into the classroom. Being out here with the kids is just a joy.” We definitely share Monica’s enthusiasm and are looking forward to the next 15 years of Bugs,

Bees, Butterflies and Blossoms!



BBBB By the Numbers

15 years * 30 beekeepers * 1,400 SFA Elementary Education interns * 30,000 elementary school students * 2 remarkable SFA faculty members * 1 arboretum

Envirothon

By Elyce Rodewald

The Texas Envirothon was held April 14-16, 2012 at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Envirothon is an academic, extra-curricular environmental and natural resource education program and competition designed for high school students. Teams of five students work together to answer questions focusing on five areas of study: aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife, and a current environmental issue, which this year was nonpoint source pollution/low impact development. In addition to the field experience, students also participate in an oral component focusing on a real-world environmental problem.



A total of 8 teams from 5 schools participated in the competition. The overall winner of the 2012 Texas Envirothon was Academy of Science and Technology, Team B from the Woodlands. Students on the winning team were: Xinyi Wang, Emily Eichelberger, Surabhi edd, Sebastian Munoz, and Rachel Reid. This team will represent Texas at the national Canon Envirothon competition to be held in Selinsgrove, PA on July 22-28, 2012.

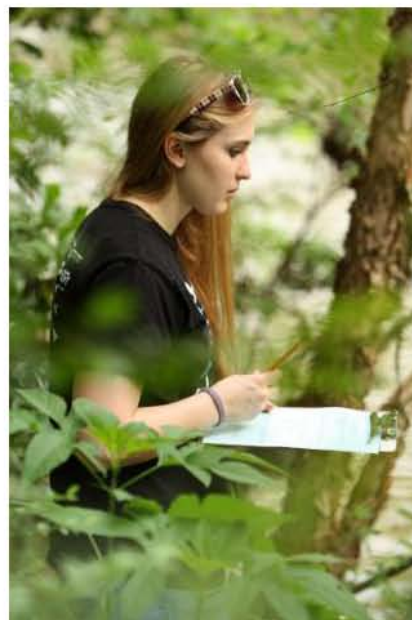
The fun began on Saturday after-

noon with student training workshops presented by a variety of professionals. Presenters included Michelle Holyfield and Alex Stanton from Eastman Chemical Company, Dr. Kenneth Farrish from SFA, John Boyette, Daniel Duncum and Donna Work from the Texas Forest Service, and Dr. Jeremy Stovall, Dr. Chris Comer and Dr. Matt McBroom from SFA. During these presentations, students received training in aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife, and oral presentation skills.

The field competition officially began on Sunday morning at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center. There were 40 students as well as

10 team advisers participating in the field testing. Questions on the field test ranged from identifying animal tracks, aquatic invertebrates and tree measurements to describing soil textures and discussing the impacts of nonpoint source pollution. More than 50 volunteers assisted with a variety of jobs that included monitoring the field stations, taking photos, leading students to each station, grading the field tests and serving as judges for the oral presentations.

To help students prepare for Sunday evening's challenge, which was to develop a proposal addressing how to best manage development of Lake Naconiche in the Attoyac Bayou Watershed, Seth Rodewald-Bates, SFA alumnus and senior landscape architect from Newton Landscape Group, presented "Keep a Lid on it: Landscape



Urbanism and Development Best Practices."

After the field testing on Sunday, the students were sequestered for three hours to work on their presentations. The presentations were delivered to a panel of six judges on Monday morning.

Sponsors of the 2012 Texas Envirothon included: Eastman Chemical Company, Enbridge Inc., Entergy Corporation, LyondellBasell, University of Houston-Clear Lake, Environmental Institute of Houston, Canon USA, Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority, Texas Association of Environmental Professionals, Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Texas Association for Environmental Education, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Harris County Soil and Water Conservation District, Montgomery County SWCD; San Patricio SWCD, Walker County SWCD, Bosque SWCD, and Upshur-Gregg SWCD.



SFA Sustainable Community Education Garden

By Dawn Stover

We are excited to introduce the SFA Sustainable Community Education Garden, located next to the SFA soccer fields close to Starr Avenue. This is a joint project with SFA Horticulture and the SFA Gardens and brings a valuable element to the direction horticultural education is taking in the United States. While the project is still in its infant stages, we hope to recycle resources generated on campus, like leaves, shredded paper and cafeteria waste, to create a renewable soil amendment. Plans for harvests include donation to local food banks and possible sales at an on-campus

farmer's market. We also hope to supply some food to SFA Campus Dining in the near future. We recently sent a request for volunteers through the magic of Facebook and have been rewarded with many new faces to our little garden world here at SFA. Anyone interested in helping with harvesting, maintenance, planting and distribution should email me at

dawnstover@sfasu.edu for an interest form and visit our the SFA Sustainable Community Education Garden Facebook page.

In addition, there are

raised beds dedicated to SFA students interested in learning to grow on their own. A new student organization, tentatively called GROW, is in the works to organize and educate these students!

Come grow with us!

